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Transsex

Unusual wedding

By Corrie M. Anders

The Solano County clerk didn't quite know what to make of the unusual nuptial and dashed off to get guidance from the politicians. A spokesman for the state Department of Corrections was equally flabbergasted.

But later this month, in a precedent-setting wedding, San Francisco beautician Kathleen Marlowe will exchange vows with Robert Lonnie Barnes, a convicted murderer, in the prison chapel at Vacaville Medical Facility.

The wedding would not be in the least bit unusual except that Kathleen Marlowe is a transsexual. She changed her name from Kenneth Marlowe three years ago following sexual surgery at Stanford University.

"No one dreamed that this person was a transsexual," said prison spokesperson Helen Atkinson, who added that Marlowe had been visiting Barnes for several months.

"If they come in with a valid wedding license, the institution doesn't have any choice not to marry them," she said.

When first asked, county clerk Neil Crawford said he wasn't sure what he would do if Marlowe asked for a \$6 license. "I've never been confronted with that situation before," he said, ending the conversation to take a quick poll of county politicians.

"I talked with the county council," he said a bit later. "If the individual came in and asked for a marriage license, we'd issue it."

Inmates at state institutions had most of their civil liberties, including the right to marry, restored about a year ago. There were a few marriages prior to then, but "we had a lot of control over who was married," said Atkinson.

She said this would be the first transsexual marriage in any state institution as far as she knew.

"I wouldn't want to tell you dead no," Atkinson said. "You know, we don't give people saliva tests and lift their skirts when they come in."

Marlowe said she met Barnes, who is serving a life term, at San Quentin two years ago when she was giving lecturers on transsexualism and gay rights through the College of Marin.

Barnes, 36, is serving concurrent terms for murder and assault with intent to commit murder in Los Angeles. He was denied parole last December and must wait until next January for a new parole consideration.

Marlowe in her 50s had wanted to marry another San Quentin inmate early last year. But the inmate, Neil Handa, turned down her proposal.

Marlowe said she has met Barnes' family and that they all know about the sex-change operation, a highly publicized affair during which fan dancer Sally Rand performed to help pay for the change.

She said the wedding on June 29 will be followed by a reception on the prison picnic grounds, and a party for 750 later that night off the prison grounds.